The British Yemeni Society

BYS Newsletter 2026, No. 4 **October 2026**

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

While the situation in Yemen remains rapidly shifting and deeply challenging – with recent events in early September on the west coast once again causing profound hardship and displacement – we remain committed to keeping our BYS members informed and connected. Though we cannot alter these macro events, BYS continues to create awareness among members and offer solidarity with the people of Yemen.

Amid these difficult realities, we also want to shine a light on the extraordinary resilience, creativity and joy emerging from our Yemeni diaspora right here in the UK. Culture and community remain powerful beacons of hope, as shown by the outstanding contributions of Yemeni artists at this year's Liverpool Arab Arts Festival (LAAF).

A Historic Venue & Lasting Legacy: The 2026 festival launched at the iconic St George's Hall – the very place where LAAF was officially founded 24 years ago. The Yemeni diaspora has been instrumental in shaping, developing and leading this festival since its inception.

Inspiring Musical Performances: The opening night featured the captivating Al-Awadel band, led by Sheffield-based Yemeni singer, composer and oud player Yaser Awdhali. Closing the festival at Sefton Park Palm House Family Day, a vibrant Birmingham-based Yemeni band led by singer and oud player Mohammed Hassan and manager/musician Samir AbdulWali brought incredible energy to the stage.

Literary & Spoken Word Mastery: Acclaimed Yemeni–British poet Amina Atiq hosted as the event's MC, building on her rich history with LAAF and her contributions to the *Yemen in Conflict* publication featured at our 2024 BYS AGM.

Visual Arts & Future Collaborations: Photographer Fuad Al-Gaadi (Liverpool) showcased striking imagery at the Open Eye Gallery while artist Farah Maktari (London) presented her powerful Almasnad artwork at the Exhibition Research Lab Gallery.

Looking Ahead: Farah, Fuad and two fellow Yemeni individuals have joined forces to create a groundbreaking dynamic art project centred around ancient Al-masnad script. Blending photography, fine art and community workshops, this new exhibition will tour some English cities, launching some time in autumn 2027.

Thank you.

BYS NEWS

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members who pay their subscription by Standing Order to our Virgin Money account are kindly asked to check that their Standing Orders have been amended to reflect the new subscription

rates which from 1 January 2026 are: Ordinary Member £30 per year, Youth Member £15 per year and Corporate Member £150 per year.

So far this year, most payments to the Virgin Money account have been at the old rates and only a few members have made an additional payment for the difference. We would, therefore, be most grateful if you could ensure that your Standing Order is for the new rate, and please consider making an additional payment for the difference if your 2026 payment was at the old rate.

Thank you.

BYS *JOURNAL*

British Yemeni Society members can look forward to receiving the 2026 issue of the *BYS Journal* in November.

Following the call in our last Newsletter, we are delighted to announce that Dr Eric Watkins will take over from Dr Noel Brehony as Editor once the 2026 edition has been published. Eric has followed Yemeni affairs since he first visited the country in 1989 and subsequently worked as a foreign correspondent based in Yemen for *The Financial Times*. Since then, while working as an advisor and journalist, he has continued to keep his eye on events in Yemen, publishing two books in connection with Yemen. The first, *Gateways of Development*, documents the discovery and development of oil in the Wadi Masila and the second, *Yemen Today*, is a collection of essays which he edited with George Joffée and M.J. Hachemi. A full collection of Eric's work on Yemen, as well as other countries in the region, is now held at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. He will combine his work as Editor with his current Hispano-Arab studies, especially of Andalusia, with a particular emphasis of Yemen's role there from the early 8th century onwards.

FUTURE BYS EVENTS

If you have suggestions for guests to speak on Yemen, please feel free to reach out to the Chair at chair@britishyemenisociety.org.uk.

BRITISH YEMENI SOCIETY ACADEMIC GRANT

As mentioned in our July Newsletter, we received eight high-quality applications for our 2025/26 academic grant and therefore decided to make two awards this year: to AlHussain Anami, a Saudi student at the Oxford University's Faculty of Linguistics, Philology and Phonetics, and Daniel Costa from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa in Portugal.

AlHussain Anami's research is a critical discourse analysis study, as part of his Master's degree, of Saudi state-affiliated religious scholars, commenting on Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Yemen from 2015. Meanwhile, Daniel Costa submitted an abstract for his undergraduate thesis entitled 'Eyes on the Strait – The Portuguese–Ottoman Rivalry over Bab el-Mandeb and its Impact on Yemen, 1530–1570' which will lead to a greater understanding of how Yemenis coped with the sixteenth-century rivalry between the Ottomans and the Portuguese.

CONNECTING WITH YEMEN

The Cultural Atelier in Yemen Peer Exchange Visits

The Arab Fund for Art and Culture has issued a report by Yasser Abdulbaqi, Executive Director of the Jedaria Foundation for Cultural Development and Media in Aden, on a peer exchange visit he paid in 2025 to Saudi Arabia.
https://youtube.com/shorts/_juKUgOvIMU?is=sMo9b8TEpfCHt-5l

The following three items deal with the often-contested field of cultural heritage. The first two report on building positives links between western institutions and cultures under threat while the third reports on artefacts looted from Yemen.

Restructuring of the UK Culture in Crisis Programme

A decade on from its foundation, the Culture in Crisis Programme is now to be managed by the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund, in partnership with the UK's Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, rather than by the Victoria and Albert Museum.
The programme will continue to bring together those with a shared interest in heritage preservation, developing an important forum for sharing information, supporting collective action and raising public awareness. In this new phase the Culture in Crisis Programme will seek to expand its work and increase its engagement globally. https://cultureincrisis.org/about

The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Republic of Yemen Announce New Loan Agreement

Her Excellency Jamila Ali Rajaa, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Yemen to the United States, and Max Hollein, The Met's Director and Chief Executive Officer, have signed an agreement at a recent ceremony at the Permanent Mission of Yemen to the UN. Two ancient stone fragments are to be loaned to the Museum, artefacts that were recently voluntarily repatriated to Yemen from a private collection in San Francisco.
https://www.metmuseum.org/press-releases/yemen-loan-agreement

Looted Yemeni Artefacts

As part of its 'Our Looted Heritage' project, Yemen's General Authority for Antiquities and Museums traces looted cultural heritage to museums, auction houses and private collections abroad. It has now identified several such artefacts sold recently in London auction houses and others in the British Museum. https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/yemen-looted-artifacts-british-museum-auctions-1234791176/

In the Shadow of Sheba by Scyld Berry

Empty Quarter Press has announced the publication in December this year of *In the Shadow of Sheba*, a travel and historical book written by veteran cricket journalist, Scyld Berry. The book was inspired by Scyld's travels in Yemen as a young man in the 1960s when the country was undergoing a period of transition and opening up to the outside world.

The Ras Morbat Eye Clinic in Aden

Our former Treasurer, John Huggins, has been in touch with news of the clinic that the British Yemeni Society has sponsored in the past. The installation of a solar power system means that the clinic is now able to generate its own power and is no longer reliant on intermittent electricity supplies or struggling to meet the cost of generator fuel. This change represents an important advance in its efforts to meet a growing demand for ophthalmological treatments.

Friends of Hadhramaut Fundraising Efforts

FoH is currently selling four stunning black Hadhrami dresses, beautifully embroidered with shells, coins, tinsel and sequins. The dresses are about 70 years old and in good condition. They cost £450 each. If you are interested in buying one, please contact FoH at hayatulmir@gmail.com mentioning the dress you are interested in purchasing.



Dress A



Dress B



Dress C



Dress D

The Build-up to Full-scale War

Readers might be interested to read Helen Lackner's article 'Are the Huthis on the Warpath' published by the *Arab Digest* at the end of July: https://arabdigest.org/sample-newsletters/are-the-huthis-on-the-warpath-2/ in which she discussed the alternatives open to the Huthis at the time.

September 2025 – One Year On

The Italian media consortium Investigative Reporting Project Italy (IRPI) has investigated the bomb in Sana'a last September that destroyed two Yemeni newspaper offices, killing 31 journalists and destroying a historic archive. See a summary in the Index on Censorship, https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2026/09/yemen-newspaper-bombing/

YEMEN

POLITICAL UPDATE

Yemen Political Update July – September 2026

This should be read in conjunction with the 'How the US / Israeli – Iran War has Destabilised the Wider Middle East' section below.

The war in Yemen has resumed, ending the truce that started in April 2022, bringing greater destruction and misery to Yemenis and exacerbating the wider regional crisis that centres on the Strait of Hormuz. The war will continue and escalate. Over 135,000 people have already been displaced, adding to the millions forced to leave their homes since the start of the war in 2015. What is happening in Yemen has clearly been influenced by the conflict between the US and Iran and the struggle to control sea routes used by Saudi and Gulf states to export their oil.

Background to the Start of the War

Tensions between Ansar Allah and the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) and its Saudi sponsor had been on the rise since at least the start of 2026, reflected in the increasingly bellicose rhetoric of Ansar Allah and its leader Abd al-Malik al-Huthi, directed against Saudi Arabia, ostensibly over the lack of serious negotiations on the road map presented by the UN Special Envoy in 2023. These had been expected to include Saudi Arabia financing salaries for state employees of the Huthi regime as a first step toward a negotiated political arrangement between Ansar Allah and the PLC. Huthi leaders have long characterised the war that started in 2015 as one between Ansar Allah and Saudi Arabia, dismissing the Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) regime as a Saudi–UAE concoction that lacks legitimacy, unity and effectiveness. Ansar Allah desperately needs to finance its military capacity and governance over the north. Saudi Arabia meets much of the PLC's military and governance costs and provides funds to pay state salaries and buy fuel to generate electricity.

Why the War Restarted

The crisis was ignited in July when an Iranian aircraft, in breach of a Saudi blockade, took a Huthi delegation from Sana'a airport to the funeral of the Iranian leader Ayatollah Khamenei (together with Yemenis in need of urgent medical care). To stop a return flight landing, the Saudis bombed the runway at Sana'a, though they did not prevent the plane from landing in Hodeida. Despite this sign of a possible Saudi wish to de-escalate, the Huthis used it as a pretext to impose a maritime blockade on Saudi Arabia and launch missiles and drones at Saudi oil and infrastructure. Ansar Allah also set in motion a carefully planned campaign to

seize Mokha and the Bab al-Mandab using a substantial force, part of which had been recruited in 2004, ostensibly to liberate Gaza.

The Huthis sought to exploit disarray within the PLC government caused by Saudi-led suppression of the Southern Transitional Council (STC – now renamed the South Arabia Transitional Council) in January 2026, after its attempt to expand its presence in Hadhramaut and Al Mahra. PLC forces were reorganised to absorb some southern units, but this was still a work in progress, and the STC still has dedicated support in the south. For the Huthis, it was an opportunity they could not ignore.

The War

The land war began in August with Huthi attacks on Marib and Hadhramaut. Both sides initially used drones and missiles, inflicting heavy casualties, while the PLC also deployed the Yemeni air force, almost certainly using aircraft supplied by Saudi Arabia. Serious fighting erupted on several fronts, notably around Taʿiz.

Mokha and the Bab al-Mandeb

In early September, Huthi forces captured the Mokha and then a string of settlements on the southern Tihama and strategic islands, notably Mayun (Perim) in the Bab al-Mandab. It was a lightning seven-day campaign that stunned the Saudis and PLC leadership. The area had been under the control of the then UAE-backed National Resistance Forces (NRF) since 2017, led by Tareq Saleh and made up of elements from the former Republican Guard, the Tihama Resistance and the Southern Giants Brigade. It had taken the NRF several months in 2017 to secure control because they needed to clear Huthi forces from the mountains overlooking the southern Tihama and Bab al-Mandab.

The stunning Huthi success followed the collapse of the NRF, which seems to have been brought about by Huthi hacking into NRF communications to order units to withdraw and exploiting poor coordination among the disparate elements within the NRF, leading to a total collapse of resistance. Most of the NRF appear to have withdrawn, losing much of their equipment.

The Next Stage

Saudi Arabia and the PLC, after their initial shock, have been fighting back (with many air strikes) and have the command of the air (though the Huthis have managed to bring down a Saudi F-15). The PLC has called for general mobilisation but will need to persuade all anti-Huthi elements to focus on defeating the Huthis and set aside other local ambitions, particularly in the south. Some southern forces have been fighting the Huthis, but others have said they will only fight if the Huthis attack them.

To protect their position in Bab al Mandab and Tihama, Ansar Allah will need to take and retain control of the mountainous hinterland, and fighting will likely centre on this region. At the same time, the PLC will have to prevent Ansar Allah from cutting the Aden–Ta'iz road, which they have been attempting to do in recent days to tighten their siege of Yemen's third-largest city. The Huthis may be tempted to try to take Marib with its important energy sources – and that would potentially open the way to Shabwah and Hadhramaut and their oilfields, However, the Huthis entered the truce in April 2022 having been exhausted by nearly two years of fighting to capture Marib and the likely battlefields would seem to favour the side with air power.

Meanwhile, Ansar Allah will continue to fire missiles and drones at targets in Saudi Arabia to pressure the kingdom and support its Iranian ally.



Qala'at al-Qahira's dominating position above Ta'iz has made it a military objective for centuries, continuing to be fought over to this day

How the US / Israeli – Iran War has Destabilised the Wider Middle East

The US / Israeli versus Iran conflict has had both direct and indirect impacts on the wider Middle East; some generic consequences, and some specific to the Middle East.

During the 'Twelve Day War' of June 2025, which mostly targeted Iran's nuclear programme, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) had been fairly focussed in its responses: attacking mostly Israeli targets, as well as CENTCOM's forward location in Al Udeid in Qatar. Although several of the Gulf countries had lobbied Trump against attacking Iran (rightly fearing that they would be attacked as a form 'hostage warfare'), the air attacks which the US and Israel launched against Iran on 28th February 2026 were a surprise to many – particularly businesses – given the lack of an invasion force. Although Iran mostly targeted US (and Israeli) military facilities throughout the region, they also attacked numerous civilian sites, including critical national infrastructure assets, particularly in the Gulf. IRI also claims to have mined the Straits of Hormuz, and fired missiles and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) at shipping trying to transit the Straits.

The immediate impact of Iran's attack was a massive outflow from the large western expat community, with a subsequent reduction in the Sub-Continental and Arab communities which supported the Gulf, with the loss of remittances. Although cushioned by stocks of products manufactured in the Gulf and by products *en route* to their destinations, soon prices of fuel and fertiliser began to increase, and therefore the cost of living, which was already high for many.

After Saudi Arabia bombed Sana'a airport to prevent an Iranian plane from returning the Huthi delegation (as well as, probably, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps personnel and

equipment), the Huthis declared a maritime blockade on Saudi Arabia (not on shipping passing Bab al-Mandab as many interpreted it), and followed this up with UAV and missile attacks on key installations within KSA. (Simultaneously – partly to support Iran and partly to take advantage of the conflict – the Huthis also stormed south along the Tihama, taking Mokha and Perim Island, as well as menacing Marib in the east.) These actions choked KSA's remaining export route via the East–West Pipeline, all the more so after a UAV attack on the port of Damietta on Egypt's Mediterranean coast.

Possibly due to the distraction of Western powers in the Gulf, there has also been an uptick in piracy around the Horn of Africa.

In the longer term, the conflict is likely to have an impact on the Gulf's post-oil economic model, focussed on tourism and a service economy (particularly around AI and data-centres) for which peace and stability are vital elements. Globally, the conflict has increased consumers' demand for renewable energy as well as sources of hydrocarbons from more stable / less constrained locations, thus probably hastening the end of oil and gas as fuels. Within the region, there has been much talk of finding alternative routes from the Gulf, whether that is a land corridor to Europe (possibly refurbishing the Hijaz Railway), or pipelines around Hormuz, or from Iraq to Syria / Turkey.

For the Arab governments, their assumptions that hosting US bases would be an aegis, and that the US would protect them against attack have both been severely challenged, particularly when coupled to popular protests against the conflict. While the US is questioning the economic benefits of rebuilding their bases, Arab governments are likely questioning the underlying premise. This is likely to see a reduction of US military in the Middle East, a concomitant reduction in US influence, and possibly – as Middle East states rebalance – an increase in Chinese and Russian influence in the region.

James Spencer

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Please contact the Society at secretary@britishyemenisociety.org.uk *if you have news or events you would like me to include in the next Newsletter. BYS Newsletters are sent out four times a year: at the beginning of January, April, July and August.*
